

FMS Foundation Newsletter

3508 Market Street suite 128, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215-387-1865)

June 12, 1992

Dear Friends,

Since we moved into University City Science Center on May 3, we have received over 200 more calls from families who tell us the now all too familiar story of a child (mostly daughters in their 30's) who suddenly recovers memories of abuse during therapy, of a child who confronts (often with a letter) and then refuses all contact with the parents, of a therapist, often unknown, unwilling to have any contact with the parents. Like the previous 300, these stories are chilling. We hear over and over again about successful, thoughtful, gentle, loving children who enter therapy and become obsessed, selfish, cruel. "The body is my daughter's, but that is not my daughter," a mother told us.

"Why the refusal to have contact?" we are asked by reporters. "We don't know," we admit, "You'll have to ask our children and their therapists." It is, however, the radical behavior change (frequently sudden) and the cutting off by adult children who before therapy had satisfactory if not excellent relationships with parents that is the hallmark of the false memory syndrome stories that we are hearing.

The psychological status of repressed memories is an issue for research and a topic that can be discussed. Different versions of history can be reconciled. But how can this happen if therapists and their clients refuse to meet with the parents whom they so hastily accuse? We must, then, ask the same question the reporters ask us, "Why the refusal to discuss these areas of difference?" Many of the parents who contact us say this is cult behavior, not therapy.

Another view of the behavior, however, is that it represents the feminist perspective that family therapy is inappropriate and that it is bad to have conjoint sessions because it tends to "perpetuate the status quo that helped create the incestuous act at its inception." "Therapists must recognize their roles as political agents." (Barrett et al Feminist-informed family therapy for the treatment of intrafamily child sexual abuse. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 4(2), 1990, p 155. The writers argue for family oriented therapy in this article.) Male power seems to be the dominant issue in this way of thinking.

The belief that the family is a terrible organization also is held by people who are part of the Recovery Movement as exemplified by the writings and work of John Bradshaw. From the Recovery Movement (12-Step) perspective, over 90% of families are dysfunctional and parents so hopeless that there simply is no point in involving them in the therapeutic process. Addiction seems to be the main issue.

FMS Foundation families do not view the situation in which they are so inextricably caught from these perspectives, obviously, nor from the "talk show perspective" of opposite sides. Although the children, therapists and the media seem to view the world as one in which people are either "in recovery" or "in denial," that is not the parents' view. The action of FMS Foundation families arises from the conviction that a very dangerous situation has arisen in the mental health field. Why it has arisen will be the stuff of dissertations for years to come.

Foundation members are deeply concerned that unless some leash is put on the growing phenomenon of false accusations that:

- a) more families will be unnecessarily destroyed;
- b) a reaction will set in such that once again children and women will not be believed when they tell of sexual abuse;
- c) disrespect for the mental health community will ensue and
- d) patients will not receive appropriate care.

We do not want these things to happen. We are hopeful that if the public understands that memory is a creative process, that memories are reconstructed and reinterpreted, that the mind does not store information like a camera or like a computer, then people will begin to question rather than automatically make an assumption of guilt in cases in which claims of sexual abuse are made from memories recovered in therapy by people who never before had them.

Pamela

Domains of Recovered Memories

The domain of recovered memories is broad: during the 1950's many clients recovered memories of their trip through the birth canal and of "engrams". In 1991, 15 people in the town of Lake Elsinore, CA recovered vivid memories and accurate details of a previous life in a small Virginia town during the Civil War. Since 1984, thousands of people have recovered memories of satanic ritual abuse conspiracies (for which no empirical data has been provided). In 1991 and 1992, millions of people have recovered memories of sexual abuse by space aliens (1992 Roper survey). We know of no psychological principle that allows us to say that memories of incest are to be believed but memories of space aliens are to be suspect. Yes, it is more probable that people are sexually abused by parents than by space aliens. But the issue is the mechanism of recovered memories. Our question is: *What makes the process of recovering repressed memories of incest different from the process used for past lives and extra-terrestrials? Why believe in one and not the other?*

Belief of Therapists

We wonder if one of the underlying factors that has fed the growth of this phenomenon is the fact that very many therapists work with the principle of total belief in the client and that any less belief would undermine the therapy. These therapists do not seem to believe that it is their job to look for verification. From their perspective the "narrative truth" is of more importance than the "historical truth" since it is the client's belief system that must be addressed in therapy.

To the extent that this principle operates within the bounds of a therapist's office, it is the business of the mental health community and the people involved. When this belief that the "narrative truth" is sufficient gets mixed with the politics of feminism, however, we get a cauldron in which false memories of incest and false accusations may bubble to the surface. Consider the following statements from *Courage to Heal*, the bible of the survivor movement: "get strong by suing," "you are not more moral or courageous if you forgive," "you must give up the idea that your parents had your best interest at heart," "you can heal with anger," "just because you don't have any memories, that doesn't mean you were not abused."

Legal Actions Against Parents

Suing the only set of parents you will ever have in life is clearly a most desperate action. It has been suggested that therapists and lawyers who encourage such actions do so because they are greedy. An alternative view is that these professionals have belief systems that hold that the family as we have known it throughout history is bad and should be destroyed. Yesterday we read the following in a booklet that came in the mail. "Over the last decade, many countries throughout the world have begun to recognize the family as a potentially dangerous institution." Reichert, Perceptions of domestic violence against women: A cross-cultural survey of international students. RESPONSE 78(14) 1992.

Just what percentage of the families are involved in legal actions? We have two sources of information: the preliminary survey results (N = 131) and detailed and consistent records of incoming phone calls between May 3 and June 5 (N=180). The data are foreboding.

From the survey we learned that 78% of accused either had or were willing to take a lie detector test. 12% told us they had already done so and one stated that he did not pass. 22% of the respondents wrote that they had been advised to go along with the charges and to confess in order that they could have contact with their children and grandchildren. We learned from the survey that 15 % of the respondents had been threatened with lawsuits, had restraining orders placed on them or were involved in civil suits brought by their children. More than 50% of the families in the survey indicated that they were worried that their children would sue them.

WHERE DO 507 FAMILIES LIVE?

AK(1)	AR (1)	AZ (18)	CA (40)	CO (5)
DE (1)	FL (8)	GA (4)	IA (2)	ID (3)
IL (11)	IN (9)	LA (4)	MA (5)	MD (4)
MI (18)	MN (4)	MO (1)	MS (1)	MT (1)
NC (4)	NJ (19)	NM (1)	NV (3)	NY (17)
OH(30)	OK (5)	OR (5)	PA (97)	SC (2)
TN (1)	TX (13)	UT (49)	VA (4)	VT (1)
WA (12)	WI (21)	DC (1)	Canada -	ON (71)
BC (6)	NS (1)	PO (1)	SK (1)	Abroad (1)

The incoming phone calls give about the same statistics: 17% of the families are being sued or are threatened with legal action by their children. This may be viewed with some concern about the future. As the memories become instantiated and anger flamed by the politics of the time, more lawsuits will surely follow—especially as the

statutes of limitations are extended or dropped state by state. Every parent, every teacher, every doctor, every therapist, every adult may be accused of sexual abuse and sued on the basis of recovered memories at any time for the rest of his or her life.

One consistency in the stories we are told is that as survivors follow the course of "memory work" that includes hypnotism, drugs, trance writing, etc. the memories of abuse grow. A feeling that one has been abused seems to become reality with a flashback which is then confirmed by a body memory. What was at first an accusation of sexual abuse grows to include satanic ritual abuse and more and more people are accused. Except that these stories include sexual abuse and arise in the course of therapy, they bear all the markings of "urban legends" and, indeed, are studied as such by folklore scholars.

As we get a feel for the survey data and as we listen to ever more stories, we are increasingly convinced that explanations for the phenomenon are not going to be found from individual pathologies (i.e., the accusing children were sick or disturbed). We suspect that understanding will come out of social psychology and the role that narrative truth plays in people's lives.

But speculating on the obvious eventual understanding of this phenomenon does not help people caught in the current hysteria. In spite of the fact that most stories don't make sense, are improbable, and have no confirming evidence, many parents are being sued and many more are worried that they will be. Even parents who have told us they have "won" their cases (meaning the charges are dropped) often lose their houses and savings. Therefore with this newsletter we have enclosed an FMS Legal Issue paper which is a compilation of many things that you have told us have been helpful.

Following are some books and articles that pertain to legal issues that you have recommended for other FMS Foundation members.

Courage to Heal. (1988).

By: Bass & Davis

Publisher: Harper and Row.

Describes for survivors how to file a lawsuit against parents and also contains a list of lawyers willing to do so. We urge professionals to read and review this "best-seller". Although the publisher is unwilling to provide the number of copies sold, a newspaper account claimed that over 200,000 copies had been sold as of March 1990. A representative for the publisher has said that it "has done very well for them."

Domestic Torts: Family Violence, Conflict and Sexual Abuse. Family Law Series. (1989).

By: Leonard Karp & Cheryl L. Karp, Ph.D.

Published: Sheppard's/McGraw-Hill Inc.

Address: P.O. Box 1235, Colorado Springs, CO 80901.

Valuable for any person looking for legal precedents.

True and False Accusations of Child Sex Abuse: A Guide for Legal and Mental Health Professionals.

By: Richard Gardner, M.D.

Publication: 9/1992, Creative Therapeutics

Address: 155 Country Road, P.O. Box R, Cresskill, NJ 07626.

Valuable for scholarly understanding and insights.

"Recovered memories of alleged sexual abuse: Lawsuits against parents" (1992). Paper delivered at American Psychological Society Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA, June.

By: Hollida Wakefield and Ralph Underwager.

Address: Institute for Psychological Therapies, 13200 Cannon City Boulevard, Northfield, MN 55057.

Valuable for scholarly understanding and insights.

Shifting the Burden of Truth: Suing Child Sexual Abusers - A Legal Guide for Survivors and Their Supporters. (1992).

By: Joseph Crnich, J.D. & Kimberly Crnich, J.D.

Published: Recollex

Address: 333 S. State St., Suite 326, Lake Oswego, OR 97035.

Advice for survivors to use in suing.

While we cannot assess exactly what the following summary of a Pennsylvania Court decision means, several lawyers have told us that it would be of great interest to any people involved in litigation. We therefore include the following:

Com v. Dunkle, __Pa.__, 602 A.2d 830 (1992)

Opinion by Cappy, J.

The defendant was charged with rape and other sex crimes resulting from a complaint made by his step-daughter. During the trial, the prosecution called an expert witness to testify on "child abuse syndrome". The Pennsylvania Supreme Court held that admission of this expert testimony was reversible error.

The court noted that the expert did not relate any of her testimony to the child in question. Finding that "abused children react in myriad ways" and that abused and non-abused children often exhibit similar behavior patterns, the court found that "[t]he existence of child abuse syndrome as either a generally accepted diagnostic tool or as relevant evidence is not supportable" and, therefore, inadmissible. The court also determined that the expert's testimony failed to meet the threshold determination of relevancy and probativity.

Finally, the court found that the expert's testimony concerning the reasons abused children delay reporting an incident of abuse to family members, why abused children omit details of the abuse, and why a sexually abused child may be unable to recall dates and times of abuse were "not beyond the ken of the average layman" and, thus, were inappropriate subjects of expert testimony.

Need for information

The desperate need of lawyers for information about the phenomenon of false memory syndrome has been brought home to us in several ways this week. Every day we do get calls from lawyers. We are pleased to help them by talking and sending material, and we feel sure that you want your

contributions to be spent in this way. Most of the lawyers with whom we have talked have been disturbed by the cases they have been asked to defend. This afternoon we spoke with one lawyer who said that the woman making the accusations had started out accusing one person but that she was now accusing 15 people of satanic ritual conspiracy. The lawyer said, "It just could not have happened. How did this case get so far? This is a small town. I know all these people. I know what is going on."

Other people who have not been lucky enough to find lawyers who had skepticism told us other stories. One family, in their 70's, told us that when their daughter sued, they were advised not to fight because they were not rich and the cost of expert witnesses at \$250 or more per hour was too much. They settled and their daughter got approximately \$12,000. But now, they say, everyone assumes that they were guilty because they didn't fight.

Another person, a professor, wrote that when he told his lawyer about the claims his daughter had made, the lawyer advised him to settle out of court. The fact that there was no evidence of any kind meant nothing. What teacher can hold his or her job when accused of sexual abuse or incest? This man wrote to say that he is now paying \$700 a month to his daughter for three years and that he hoped that this did not happen other professors. When we shared this story with a friend, he said, "Why, that is blackmail!"

This is not a nice business.

IRS APPROVAL

The Internal Revenue Service has sent us notice that our application for recognition as a publicly supported tax exempt public charity has been approved. **Donors may deduct contributions to FMS Foundation (including contributions previously made).**

At the time that we applied for this status, we were asked to project the number of families and the amount of funding that we would receive during 1992. You may be interested to learn that we exceeded our predictions in the first three months of our existence.

Where are we going?

The rate at which we are receiving calls from families continues to increase. Where is all this going to lead? How is it going to end? When will we be able to talk to our children or give our grandchildren birthday presents? What will happen to our children? We know they must forever carry these awful memories with them. What if they begin to doubt them? What will they *think and feel* if they ever come to

recognize what they have done? We must work to find ways to welcome them back and make the process as easy as possible. This will end. We can work to speed up the process and to minimize the hurt.

What are flashbacks?

A month ago, we wrote asking for information about flashbacks and body memories. Richard Gardner addresses these topics in his soon-to-be-published book, *True and False Accusations of Child Sex Abuse: A Guide for Legal and Mental Health Professionals*. We thought that you would be interested in what he has to say on the subject of flashbacks and he gave us permission to print the following passage in the newsletter.

"Another area of memory with which the therapists described here take liberties relates to the phenomenon of the *flashback*. A flashback is basically an eruption into conscious awareness of a buried memory that has generally been traumatic. Usually, the flashback is brought into conscious awareness by some external stimulus that evokes it. Often the stimulus has some similarity to the original traumatic event. An example would be the war veteran who has been traumatized in battle. Years later, exposure to situations that might be peripherally similar to the original battlefield conditions may evoke visual imagery (and associated thoughts and feelings) of actual battlefield scenes.

"An important element in the flashback phenomenon is that there is generally no prolonged period in which the traumatized individual is completely free of flashbacks. Rather, as time goes on, their frequency diminishes, sometimes even to the point where they will be rare. Obviously, the greater the trauma, the longer will be the period of flashbacks and the less the likelihood that they will disappear completely. Individuals who suffer from flashbacks do not generally have the experience of many years of freedom from them and then their sudden reappearance 15, 20, or 30 years later. There are just too many environmental stimuli that can potentially evoke the flashback to allow for such a prolonged symptom-free period.

"Therapists of the kind I am describing here do not subscribe to this well-established principle. Rather, they believe that a girl who was sexually abused at three can be completely free of flashbacks for many decades and then, at age 43, for example, can suddenly experience flashbacks about her experiences. Sexual intercourse with her husband (even after years of marriage) may have served as the evoking stimulus. Although the woman may have had sexual relations with her husband hundreds of times, and although she may have had multiple sexual experiences with other lovers (past and present), this particular sexual encounter—one that occurred in the course of treatment—now becomes the evoking stimulus for the flashback. Or, if she is not in treatment, it may have occurred after she read an article about it or learned about a friend who had this experience. (We see here once again

the power of human suggestibility and gullibility.) In either case, the flashback is considered to be "proof" of the abuse, and the therapist is likely to point to the phenomenon's inclusion in the DSM-III-R as one of the manifestations of the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the diagnosis most often applied to people who have been raped and/or sexually traumatized in other ways.

How can you help?

•Perhaps the most important thing that you can do is to keep a written record of your feelings and of the events in your family as they unfold. FMS Foundation will keep an archive of these records so that scholars in the future will have a source of information about this phenomenon.

•Your written record is something that you will be able to share with your grandchildren at such time as reconciliation begins. It will be one way that the grandchildren can begin to understand that we did not abandon them. Many grandparents tell us that they write to their grandchildren on a regular basis and file the letters for that longed-for day.

•Please continue to send us clippings and notices of "survivors meetings". We are growing so rapidly that we are not always able to acknowledge each piece that you send. Rest assured that each is a treasure that is cataloged. Please try to include the location and the date with your clipping or notice or tape.

•Continue to reach out and tell your story. The reason that we have been getting increasing amounts of media coverage is because you are making the contacts. The people that you tell know you and they know your family. That gives them a framework with which to make some judgment about the phenomenon. If you know a writer or reporter who is interested, please give us a call and we will support your efforts with a press packet and anything else that is needed.

•The ads that you have been placing are resulting in calls. If you want to place an ad, we recommend the following:

Have you been falsely accused on the basis of "repressed memories." You are not alone. Please help us document the extent of this problem. Contact: False Memory Syndrome Foundation, Suite 128, 3508 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104. 1-800-568-8882.

If you would like the office to help you place an ad, please call us.

•Continue to monitor the media. If only one side of the survivor story is told, ask to have the other represented.

MEETINGS

Southwest Area

Saturday, June 27, 1992

1:00 P.M.

**Holidome Inn West
Meridian and Highway # 40
Oklahoma City**

**Persons may make own reservations
405-942-8511**

**Ask for FMS Foundation Southwest rooms
(\$49. outside of Holidome, \$59 inside)**

Agenda being developed.

Lynn, one of the young women who has restored her real memories, will share her experiences.

Toronto, Canada area

Meeting is being planned.

**For details call
Paula, 705-522-2809**

Northwest area (Washington)

Meeting is being planned

**For details call
Chuck, 206-364-4711**

Utah area

Thursday evening June 25

Speaker: Dr. Raskin

Call Helen at 801-537-7401 for details

We expect to put out two newsletters during the summer: one in July and one in August. If you have information that you think should be shared with members, please send it to us and we will try to include it. Deadlines are July 15 and August 15 for those months.

I remember getting the phone call from my sister. I was working at a new job and trying to adjust to the summer heat and being alone in a strange place. It was on a Sunday afternoon when she called and hit me with the revelation. She said she had a "dream" that our Dad had sexually abused her when she was a kid. She went on and on, in gross, graphic detail. The abuse had gone on for years according to her--rape, sodomy, oral sex. She insisted that I was not only a witness to these violations on her, but I had been violated myself.

My sister and I are one year and a half apart in age. We went to the same Catholic schools, we had usual teenage adventures, and we shared the same bedroom for many years. None of the carnage she described took place in the bedroom I slept in!

My Dad and sister fought a lot but it seemed the usual rebellious stuff of a budding adult who was still living at home but wanting to be independent. But she got married when she was 21 instead of being on her own. When she was 30 she had an adorable son. What happened to my sister? If she had so much hate and resentment for my Father and Mother why didn't she try to talk to them about it? But to accuse Dad of having sex with her and saying that Mom was just as guilty by not doing anything about it, well, that's nothing but crazy. I should know. I was there!

My parents were devastated and so very hurt. Now they are mad. I'm angry at her too, but I also feel sorry for her because she is in such a mess. Someone somehow planted a wicked seed in her vulnerable brain and it not only took root, it grew into a big ugly "blame-bush." She now has a cause, a crusade and I no longer have an older sister, at least not the one I knew for 35 years.

I pray for my Mom and Dad, that they have the strength and courage to get through this intact. I pray for my sister that someday she has another revelation called "the truth." I'm not counting on that happening but I do wish we could all be a family again. I hope I see her again. As much as I hate what she is doing...I still love her.

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